Dear Region through Territory Leaders,

As was announced in September, moving forward we will provide a curriculum of Soka Spirit related material for youth who are conducting the study presentations at these meetings. The curriculum will include information about the roles that should be fulfilled by the youth division (MC, fukudoshi and study presentation) at these weekly chanting sessions, as well as weekly topics for the speakers to base their study presentation on. The Soka Spirit study topics will be pulled from the SGI-USA publications, *The New Human Revolution*, and Ikeda Wisdom Academy lectures. The aim of this effort is to provide youth division members with an outline to create an informative and encouraging study presentation.

The December curriculum is attached. Thank you so much for all of your efforts!

Thank you!
National Youth Leaders
SOKA SPIRIT CHANTING SESSIONS

➤ PURPOSE

1) Chant Nam-myoho-reng-kyo to establish the correct teaching for the peace of the land.
2) Hone our abilities to recognize devilish functions internally and externally.
3) Learn the essential spirit of President Ikeda and the SGI.
4) Unite around the current SGI-USA direction and focus.

➤ SUGGESTED AGENDA

- Daimoku and gongyo led by central figure (1 hour)
- Study presentation by youth member (5 min)
- Encouragement by region–national line leader (7–10 min)

➤ RESPONSIBILITIES

- **Fukudoshi**
  
  Two–three youth should be assigned to support daimoku as fukudoshi for 20–30 minutes each. For tips on being fukudoshi, please see p. 2.

- **MC**
  
  One youth emcee, with the support of seniors in faith, should be assigned to welcome the members and move the meeting along. For tips on being emcee, please see p. 2.

- **Study Presentation**
  
  One youth, with the support of seniors in faith, should give a well-prepared study presentation (5 min) based on the Soka Spirit curriculum. Please see the Soka Spirit study guide.

- **Encouragement**
  
  A region–national line leader of any division should share encouragement related to the current organizational focus and convey the spirit of the week or month.

**Note:** The Soka Spirit toso is a wonderful training opportunity for the youth. If there are no youth for the responsibilities above, please work with the region or zone to find youth support.
TIPS ON BEING EMCEE

- **The emcee’s voice should be stirring, powerful and brimming with life force.**
  “Emcees must have the determination to bear full responsibility for the meeting and use their voices to transform the atmosphere into a place of joy in seeking the Law, a true Buddhist assembly” (The New Human Revolution, vol. 25, p. 187).

- **Get a good night’s sleep and eat a proper meal.**
  “An emcee needs to enunciate, so that everyone can hear and understand what is said. Facial expressions are also important. An emcee mustn’t look tired or unwell. When you’re going to take on the crucial role of emcee, you need to get a good night’s sleep the day before” (NHR-25, 189–90).

- **Pay special attention to timing during the meeting and be able to respond quickly.**
  “There are times when you need to jump right in and speak to keep the tempo upbeat, and times when you need to take a breath and pause. If you lack that crucial sense of timing, you can possibly ruin the meeting’s mood” (NHR-25, 191).

- **Chant Nam-myoho-renge-kyo prior to the meeting.**
  “It’s vital that you chant with strong determination to make the meeting you’re moderating a success. The purpose of Soka Gakkai meetings is to advance kosen-rufu, and they are the contemporary versions of the assembly of the Lotus Sutra. As such, serving as an emcee at a meeting is to carry out the noble work of the Buddha” (NHR-25, 192).

TIPS ON BEING FUKUDOSHI

- **Maintain a consistent and dynamic rhythm together with the person leading.**
  “You must first listen carefully to the voice of the person leading gongyo and stay in rhythm with it. It’s important to neither get ahead nor fall behind. In addition, you should try to ensure that the rhythm of gongyo is dynamic and exhilarating like a fine steed galloping across the open plains” (The New Human Revolution, vol. 25, pp. 192–93).

- **Avoid slowing down.**
  “When a large number of people are participating, both the sutra recitation and chanting tend to gradually slow down, but you mustn’t allow yourself to be dragged along. You should try to lead everyone at a lively tempo” (NHR-25, 193).

- **Pronounce the words in the sutra clearly.**
  “It’s also necessary to pronounce the words in the sutra recitation clearly. You should strive during your own daily gongyo to do your very best at all times, making sure you aren’t slipping into sloppy pronunciation habits, and that you’re breathing in the appropriate places” (NHR-25, 193).

- **Strive for a resonant, clear, powerful, refreshing gongyo.** (NHR-25, 193)
December Curriculum: Week 1

Material: Nov. 28: The SGI’s Religious Revolution
November 8, 2019 World Tribune, Spiritual Independence Insert, pp. A, D

Context: Nichiren Buddhism is based on the principle that all people have the potential to attain enlightenment. Contrary to this, the Nichiren Shoshu priesthood began advocating an erroneous doctrine of the superiority and authority of priests over laity. Following its spiritual independence in 1991, the SGI-USA began the Soka Spirit movement to clarify the correct teaching and practice of Nichiren Buddhism.

Key Excerpt: A closer look at the history of Nichiren Shoshu reveals that, aside from Nichikan and a small number of priests who remained faithful to Nichiren Daishonin’s teachings, over the centuries the heritage and lifeblood of faith was lost time and again. The Daishonin’s spirit had long been missing from within the priesthood.

   In sharp contrast, even in prison both presidents Tsunesaburo Makiguchi and Josei Toda continued to uphold their belief in the Daishonin’s teachings, and President Makiguchi gave his very life. The true light of Buddhism, the spirit of the Daishonin, in this way was protected by the Soka Gakkai, which carried on the heritage of faith. The Soka Gakkai prevented Nichiren Buddhism from being extinguished. (The New Human Revolution, vol. 8, pp. 160–61)

Key Point: Only by practicing with the Soka Gakkai, which follows the example of the three founding presidents, can we inherit Nichiren Daishonin’s essential spirit for justice, the respect for the dignity of life and the equality of all people.

Preparing for the Presentation (5 minutes):

• Read the reference material.
• Seek from seniors in faith about the study material.
• Share the context, excerpt and key point.
• Conclude with a personal determination of how we can apply this guidance in our lives.

Note: Please chant abundant daimoku throughout the preparation.
Material: Soka Spirit Chanting Sessions: Our Proud Tradition
November 8, 2019 World Tribune, Spiritual Independence Insert, p. D

Context: Every Sunday morning, SGI-USA Buddhist centers have been holding Soka Spirit chanting sessions to identify and defeat devilish functions and reaffirm the core principles of Nichiren Buddhism.

Key Excerpt: The impetus [for Soka Spirit chanting sessions] came in April 2003, when the New York members learned that Nikken Abe, then high priest of Nichiren Shoshu, would come to the city that summer to visit ground zero, the site of the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks . . .

They saw his visit for what it was—a publicity stunt from someone who had attempted across decades to systematically destroy the SGI’s humanistic, people-centered movement by perpetuating his priestly authority.

The members gathered at the New York Culture Center every Sunday morning, praying fervently to combat this negative function and reaffirm their commitment to spreading peace . . .

In June 2003, Nikken came to New York and visited ground zero, wielding a mammoth, life-sized check for a photo op. Standing inconspicuously in the background was a marble plaque the SGI-USA members had presented at ground zero with these words from President Ikeda: “To transform days of tragedy into days of happiness, days of anguish into days of peace.”

Also at the site was a floral wreath that President Ikeda had presented to the victims and their families at ground zero. Without fanfare or notice, President Ikeda continued to present a floral wreath at ground zero every week for a decade.

Key Point: Weekly Soka Spirit chanting sessions emerged from the spirit to fight devilish functions and spread the correct teaching of Buddhism. Rather than seeking out shallow recognition or praise, President Ikeda and SGI members have continued to selflessly pray and take action for kosen-rufu.

Preparing for the Presentation (5 minutes):
• Read the reference material.
• Seek from seniors in faith about the study material.
• Share the context, key excerpt and key point.
• Conclude with how Soka Spirit chanting sessions have impacted your life.

Note: Please chant abundant daimoku throughout the preparation.
December Curriculum: Week 3

**Material:** May 2018 *Living Buddhism* (Part 2 of 2)

https://www.worldtribune.org/article/struggle-establish-buddhism-people/

**Context:** Nichiren Daishonin refuted the Nembutsu teaching as the “one evil” of Japan of the time because its idea of a better life after death encouraged escapism and sapped people’s will to live, ultimately increasing suffering. What, then, is the “one evil” of today?

**Key Excerpt:** This “one evil” is found in the life-negating ideas that exist in our society. The SGI upholds the idea of the sanctity and dignity of life. In contrast, there also exist ideas in society that devalue life. There are people in the world who sacrifice the lives of others, or even kill others, for their own gain. In our world, the modern-day “one evil” is this rampant growth of the devaluing of life. We could say that our battle to realize kosen-rufu lies in fighting this “one evil” . . .

The only way to transform society is for each person to differentiate between good and evil, stop supporting negative causes and to challenge the thoughts, impulses, words and actions that arise from our fundamental darkness or ignorance and cause suffering for ourselves or others . . .

Nichiren concludes in “On Establishing the Correct Teaching for the Peace of the Land” that we must first “quickly reform the tenets that we hold in our hearts” (see *The Writings of Nichiren Daishonin*, vol. 1, p. 25). In other words, we must win over our own mistaken beliefs about ourselves and others and then “see to it that others as well are warned of their errors” (WND-1, 26) by engaging them in dialogue and sharing with them the life-affirming teaching of Nichiren Buddhism. (pp. 28–29)

**Key Point:** The SGI’s struggle to win over the “one evil” in today’s society begins with each person challenging themselves to believe in their own Buddha nature, and then helping others awaken to their Buddha nature through dialogue based on the life-affirming ideals of Nichiren Buddhism.

**Preparing for the Presentation (5 minutes):**

- Read the reference material.
- Seek from seniors in faith about the study material.
- Share the context, key excerpt and the key point.
- Conclude with a brief experience or how we can apply this guidance in our lives.

Note: Please chant abundant daimoku throughout the preparation.
December Curriculum: Week 4


**Context:** After establishing Aomori Chapter, SGI President Ikeda, who appears in the novel as Shin’ichi Yamamoto, asks newly appointed chapter leader Tadashi Kaneki and nine new district leaders to come to the front of the room to explain the importance of unity.

**Key Excerpt:** Shin’ichi then said: “Okay. Now I’d like you to form a circle around Mr. Kaneki and put your arms on the shoulder of the person standing next to you.”

Looking perplexed, they all moved to stand in a circle with Kaneki in the center . . .

“Is this what you mean?” one of the men in the circle ventured . . .

“Yes, that’s fine. Please, everyone, I’d like you always to remember this picture. It’s an example of the unity that Aomori Chapter should aim for. If the nine district leaders firmly unite around the chapter leader, no one can disrupt your solidarity. However, if this circle is broken and the nine district leaders become disconnected and out of sync with one another, confusion and disorder will soon result. Unity is strength . . .

“Those of you who will become district leaders, please do your utmost to support and protect the chapter leader. And Mr. Kaneki, as chapter leader, please do everything in your power to assist the district leaders and work for the happiness of all the members in the chapter. If you protect the members, you in turn will be protected. This is the Buddhist law of cause and effect . . .

“Therefore, no matter what may happen in the future, please never forget this circle. Base yourselves on faith and place unity first so you can make Aomori the warmest and most harmonious chapter in all Japan.”

**Key Point:** We must battle our own tendency to separate from others and disunite, and always remember to base ourselves on faith, and support and protect one another.

**Preparing for the Presentation (5 minutes):**

- Read the reference material.
- Seek from seniors in faith about the study material.
- Share the context, key excerpt and key point.
- Conclude with how we can apply this guidance in our lives.

Note: Please chant abundant daimoku throughout the preparation.
December Curriculum: Week 5


Context: SGI President Ikeda explains the oneness of good and evil through the relationship exemplified by Shakyamuni and Devadatta. Shakyamuni represents good, while Devadatta, a former disciple of Shakyamuni who later betrayed his mentor due to greed and jealousy, represents evil. Rather than two separate entities, Buddhism teaches the oneness of good and evil.

Key Excerpt: Many philosophical arguments have been made about good and evil in both past and present, East and West. Without going into these various perspectives, the point that life is the objective and the end and must not be turned into a means is key; this is the major premise. To enrich this supremely noble life and make it shine is good; to turn life into a means and cause it to contract is evil.

Also, unity is good while fragmentation is evil. The highest good, therefore, is to help people open up the world of Buddhahood in their lives and to forge a global solidarity of good will. The movement for peace, culture and education based on Buddhism, that is to say, our movement of kosen-rufu, accords entirely with this objective. Carrying out these activities means putting the principle of the oneness of good and evil, in which evil is embraced and transformed by good, into dynamic practice.

The point is to advance while intently reflecting on and grappling to master the self; to defeat one’s inner weaknesses and advance. When we do so, we are truly reading the “Devadatta” chapter. Ultimately, the bitter struggle between Shakyamuni and Devadatta exists within each of our lives. When we understand the sutra in this light we are reading it from the standpoint of Nichiren Buddhism.

Key Point: As exemplified by Shakyamuni and Devadatta, the bitter struggle between good and evil exists within each of our lives at every moment. Good can only be brought forth by the diligent efforts to unite with others and defeat one’s inner weaknesses.

Preparing for the Presentation (5 minutes):
• Read the reference material.
• Seek from seniors in faith about the study material.
• Share the context, key excerpt and key point.
• Conclude with a brief experience or how we can apply this guidance in our lives.

Note: Please chant abundant daimoku throughout the preparation.